British Waterways

IMPLEMENTING GOVERNMENT POLICY

An extract from Our Plan for the Future 2005-2009

As well as being governed by the normal accounting, employment, environmental, planning and safety legislation that affects any modern organisation, we are specifically governed by the Transport Acts of 1962 and 1968 as well as many of the original canal enabling Acts.

Our sponsoring government departments are the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs in England and Wales and, in Scotland, the Scottish Executive. We also liaise closely with the Department for Economic Development and Transport in Wales and Regional Assemblies.

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOVERNMENTS

The Westminster government sets out its objectives for us in the published Framework Document for British Waterways (DETR, 1999). Our aims, as explained in the Framework Document, can be summarised as follows:

- maintain and develop our inland waterways in a sustainable manner, so that they fulfil their full economic, social and environmental potential
- fulfil our statutory navigation functions
- conserve our waterway heritage and environment
- promote and enable rural and urban regeneration
- maintain and enhance leisure, recreation, tourism and educational opportunities for the general public
- facilitate waterway transport
- play a lead role in co-ordinating other UK navigation authorities
- act commercially

Waterways for Tomorrow, the Westminster government's policy document for inland waterways in England and Wales, sets out the context in which this Plan has been developed.

In summary the government:

- sees the inland waterways as 'an important asset for future generations to enjoy'
- wants to see waterways 'maintained and developed in a sustainable way so that they fulfil their social, economic and environmental potential'
- wants to ensure that 'the many benefits and opportunities they provide are used to the full'

(Waterways for Tomorrow, p16, published 2000).

It describes British Waterways as:
'A public corporation which runs its affairs on a commercial basis consistent with its statutory powers and obligations for navigation and the environment; and its objectives agreed by the government.
It is expected to promote the use of its waterways for leisure and recreation, tourism, regeneration, and transport while also conserving their built and natural heritage'.

In 2002 the Scottish Executive published Scotland's Canals – An Asset for the Future, the first ever policy document for Scotland's canals. The Scottish Executive believes that our canals are an asset that, if used wisely, can enhance the future quality of life in Scotland.

Their strategy to achieve this is based on five main principles:

- increasing awareness of canals in general and encouraging more private sector investment
- encouraging all public bodies sponsored by the Executive and local authorities to continue to work together and support the sustainable development and regeneration of canals and their surrounding areas
- promoting voluntary sector and community involvement in canals, with particular regard to their educational value and their positive impact on quality of life
- promoting the need for other public policy decisions to take account of the sustainable development and regeneration aims for our canals
- British Waterways will continue to receive Scottish Executive grant to meet its statutory duties and help progress new initiatives, but is encouraged to develop new and existing earned income streams

We work with our sponsoring government departments to maintain, care and develop the waterways. Nicol Stephen, Minister for Transport, Scottish Executive, discovers our property development at Edinburgh Quay alongside young visitors. ▶

Rt Hon Alun Michael MP, Waterways Minister, presents interpretation manager Annette Simpson and economic & social development manager, Nicola Lewis-Smith, Wales & Border Counties with the community award for Trevor Basin at the Waterways Renaissance Awards. ▼

In 2003 we produced the consultation document, Waterways for Wales, at the request of the Welsh Assembly Government. Waterways for Wales places inland waterways in a strategic context and sets out the positive contribution they can make to the future of Wales.

We use all of these documents to guide us in our business planning.

THE FUTURE

Our continued aim is to remain an exemplar public body, delivering public benefit.

We need to be less exposed to the uncertainty of government funding, and will do this by operating more commercially. Our aspiration is to be in a position where we are not financially obliged to accept government funding over and above what is in our contract.

Our ultimate objective is to operate as a successful public interest company enjoying a high degree of freedom and reinvesting all net income into the waterways on a not-for-dividend model.

We welcome the findings of Defra's five-year, End-to-End, review of British Waterways which recognises the important contribution thriving canals and rivers make to local communities, boaters and other waterway visitors and users, and supports our aim to become largely self-sufficient.

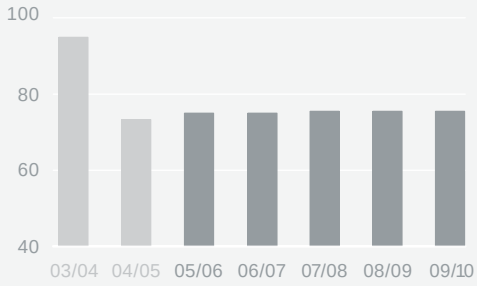
The review, published in March 2005, supported our vision for the waterways. It also endorsed the principles of funding British Waterways on a long-term contractual basis, and greater commercial freedoms with wider powers to invest near to waterways we do not manage.

We will continue our discussions with Defra to:

- convert deficit funding to a contractual payment based on defined outputs and service levels
- achieve additional commercial freedoms to generate greater financial independence

If you like to know more about how our plans could affect you, please visit our website at www.britishwaterways.co.uk/plan

Defra and Scottish Executive Grant £m



The increase in 2003/04 grant reflects a temporary and specific program to invest in water control facilities and to reduce the backlog of safety-related maintenance, including one-off funds from the Scottish Executive for specific works in Scotland.